

Constantine II

(9 September 337 – c. January 350)



BRIEFING

Constantine II (Latin: *Flavius Claudius Constantinus*; 316–340) was Roman emperor from 337 to 340. The son of the emperor Constantine I, he was proclaimed *caesar* by his father shortly after his birth. He was associated with military victories over the Sarmatians, Alamanni and Goths during his career, for which he was granted a number of victory titles.[4] He held the consulship four times – in 320, 321, 324, and 329.

Constantine I had arranged for his sons to share power with their cousins Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, but this was not accepted by Constantine II and his brothers. As a result, Constantine II's brother Constantius II ordered the killings of numerous male relatives following Constantine I's death, including Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, thus eliminating any possible opponents to the succession of Constantine I's sons. Constantine II then ascended to the throne alongside his two younger brothers, ruling Gaul, Hispania, and Britain. However, his belief in his rights of primogeniture and attempts to exert them over his youngest brother Constans caused conflict, which ended with his death in a failed invasion of Italy in 340. Constans subsequently took control of Constantine's territories, with the latter being subjected to *damnatio memoriae*.

LIFE

Born in Arles in 316, Constantine II was the second son of the Roman emperor Constantine I, and probably the eldest with his wife Fausta, the daughter of the emperor Maximian.

Caesar

On 1 March 317, he was made *caesar* at Serdica. After accompanying his father on his campaign against the Sarmatians in 323, he was commemorated on coinage produced to recognize the ensuing victory. Constantine II usually resided with his father until 328, when his own court was installed at Trier. An inscription dated to 328–330 records the title of *Alamannicus*, indicating that his generals won a victory over the Alamanni. His military career continued when Constantine I made him field commander during the 332 winter campaign against the Goths. As a result of his leadership, the military operation concluded with 100,000 Goths reportedly slain and the surrender of the ruler Ariaric. Festival games were initiated in Rome to celebrate the *caesar's* role in the successful military campaigns, in a public advertisement of his capability to rule. He was married prior to 336, although his wife's identity remains unknown. David Woods has theorized that she may have been a half-cousin, possibly a daughter of Julius Constantius, as Constantine minted coins of his grandfather's second wife Flavia Maximiana Theodora. Another suggestion by Barnes is that she could have been a daughter of Flavius Optatus.

While Constantine I had intended for his sons to rule together with their cousins Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, soon after his death in May 337 the army murdered several of their male relatives, including Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, on the orders of Constantine II's younger brother Constantius II. Although Constantine himself appears to not have been directly involved, Burgess observed from numismatic evidence that he and his brothers "not only seem not to have fully accepted the legitimacy of Dalmatius and viewed him as an interloper, but also appear to have communicated with one another on this point and agreed on a common response."

In what seemed to be an attempt to distance themselves from the massacre, the three brothers proceeded to print coins of Theodora, whom their murdered relatives had been descended from. Most of the coins were generated at Constantine II's capital, Trier, indicating that he was the one responsible for designing and producing the coinage at the start, as well as convincing his brothers to do the same. Woods considered it to suggest that he was more sympathetic to Theodora's memory than his brothers, possibly because his wife may have been a granddaughter of Theodora.

In June 337, before he was named emperor, Constantine had already begun attempting to assert his seniority. He issued an order allowing the exiled bishop Athanasius to return to Alexandria, which was under the control of Constantius II, claiming to be carrying out the unfulfilled intentions of his father. While Constantine's motives remain unclear, suggested explanations include him truly believing in the bishop's innocence, him wanting to get rid of a religious nuisance, or him wanting to cause trouble for Constantius, who would oust Athanasius from Alexandria only two years later.

Augustus

The three brothers were not named as *Augusti* until 9 September 337, when they gathered together in Pannonia and divided the Roman territories among themselves. Constantine received Gaul, Britannia and Hispania. Unlike his younger brothers, he gained little from Dalmatius's removal.

Constantine was evidently left unsatisfied with the results of their meeting, seemingly believing that his age granted him some sort of seniority in the imperial college and, by extension, control over the dominion of his youngest brother Constans, who was still a teenager in 337. Even after campaigning successfully against the Alamanni in 338, Constantine continued to maintain his position. The Theodosian Code recorded his legislative intervention in Constans's territory through issuing an edict to the proconsul of Africa in 339.

In April 340, Constantine launched an invasion into Italy to claim territory from Constans. Constans, at that time in Naissus, sent a number of troops to confront him, and Constantine was killed in an ambush near Aquileia. Constans then took control of his brother's realm, whose inhabitants seem to have been largely unaffected by their change in ruler.

After his death, Constantine was subjected to *damnatio memoriae*. Constans issued legislation repealing Constantine's acts shortly after his death, where the deceased emperor was branded as "the public enemy and our own enemy." Years later, when Libanius delivered a panegyric for both Constans and Constantius, Constantine was completely omitted from the narrative, as if he had never existed.